

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes

FINAL

April 18, 2012, 7:30 p.m.

Chenery Community Room

Present: Chair Allison; Members Baghdady, Becker, Epstein, Grob, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Millane, Sarno; Selectman Jones; School Committee Representative Scharfman

Members Absent: Bruschi, Dash, McHugh

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chair Allison.

Chair Allison began by reviewing the evening's agenda as well as reviewing the order of items on the agenda. She noted that the WC will not be voting, as a group, on the departmental reports' recommendations.

Discussion and Vote on April Town Meeting Articles

Article 18: Demolition By-Law

Chair Allison invited Mr. Michael Smith, Chair of the Historic District Commission (HDC), to the WC table. Mr. Smith summarized the HDC's arguments for this article and then took questions.

Mr. Smith addressed the question of overreach by citing evidence that the HDC has not deemed many buildings historically significant. He noted that the 50-year mark stems from the goal to protect modernist homes (built in the early 1960s) that are worthy of preservation. He said the HDC will try to put together a definitive list of significant buildings. He said that operational costs would be minor and absorbed by the HDC. The HDC, he said, does indeed want "a seat at the table" regarding historic town buildings. He cited the Homer Building as an example of a building that would have been torn down without the intervention of the HDC.

Member Libenson noted that the most common delay among Massachusetts communities is a six-month delay, why is it 12 months for Belmont? Mr. Smith said that 12 months is the time recommended by the American Historical Commission and that communities that have a shorter period often have more preservation protections in place. He said developers will simply wait out a six-month delay, and a 12-month delay provides time to explore alternatives. Member McLaughlin asked about the list: how long will it take to develop a list and, if it will take a while, would they consider a sunset clause? Mr. Smith said the HDC will seek CPA funding to create a list, and it could take more than a year to do so. Member Lynch asked about the HDC funding the administration piece. Mr. Smith said HDC members would pay for administrative costs

out of their pockets. He said there is not a town cost involved except the cost of notifying owners of a public hearing.

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- Member Baghdady noted that the PB supports this by-law, with three changes: 1) that it allow for the acceleration of the process with municipal buildings, 2) that it be limited to structures built before 1921 (otherwise all buildings in the town would eventually fall under this bylaw); and 3) that it include an understanding that development currently under discussion (South Pleasant Street and Cushing Square) would not be included. Member Epstein asked whether this would not negatively impact every homeowner planning to sell his home, since a potential buyer would have no way of knowing whether demolition would be permitted. Member Becker said that having the list of properties in hand makes a lot of sense. Member Grob suggested starting with a six month time-frame until a list is generated.

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- **Planning Board Input:** Member Baghdady began by noting the PB has been involved in crafting this by-law and introduced exemptions to areas slated for development in town. He said the PB and the HDC could not reach agreement on the year (or time-frame) issue. The PB supported 1921, the already-existing standard for preferred treatment of accessory buildings. He noted that the 50-year standard covers 80% of Belmont's buildings. The PB felt a set year provides the most certainty for property owners, while the 50-year mark adds new properties to it each year. Member Sarno said he agrees with the sunset clause and noted that any list generated would always be evolving.

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- Chair Allison noted that Member Dash has submitted (as an individual, not as a WC member) an amendment to this by-law. She said this article will be voted on when the WC meets prior to TM. She read Member Dash's amendment to this by-law.

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- Member McLaughlin wondered if this amendment was, procedurally, in the proper form, e.g., is it amending the actual motion? The WC discussed Member Dash's amendment. Member Libenson noted that this is an example of where we might individually choose to vote differently in our capacity as a WC member vs. how we'd vote as a TM member. As a WC member, one may perceive the financial consequences as not significant enough to oppose, but as a TM member one might choose to oppose the amendment for policy reasons. Chair Allison said that the financial consequences could indeed be significant (and negative), as new construction could be impacted, which could in turn also impact the sale of homes. She also noted the impact on municipal reuse. She added that more information is needed on the extent of the renovation which required a demolition permit. The WC discussed.

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- **Article 14: Incinerator Site**

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- Chair Allison reframed the major questions regarding this article: what is the scope of the study, given that the ultimate use has not been decided? Why pay for a cap design study at this point, and whose timeline is this moving forward on?

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- She then noted that Town Engineer Glenn Clancy informed her that \$4.1M is in the fund and this money can only be used for work at this site. However, three items need to be completed before reuse work on the incinerator site: the cap design and study which will cost about \$90K, another study (the CAAA) which will cost about \$200K, and the demolition of the old incinerator which will cost about \$530K. The consent agreement signed with Mass. E.P. requires that this work be completed in FY13. Therefore, TM will be asked to appropriate \$824K from the Landfill Fund.

- Chair Allison reviewed the potential uses for this site, which include: open space, playing fields, and a solar farm. The title issue, noted Community Development, is irrelevant: even if Belmont does not own this site, the state feels that Belmont still has the obligation to clean it up (as Belmont spoiled it).

- The WC then discussed content of the CAAA study, with Member Manjikian and SC Representative Scharfman summarizing the results of their online research.

- **Article 15: Trapelo Road and Belmont Street Improvements**

- Chair Allison noted that this article will likely be deferred until May. She noted that questions arose regarding what amount of money would be involved as this article involves two parcels of Belmont-owned land. One important question concerned the potential tax revenue impact. Chair Allison offered that there is no tax impact on the larger parcel as it is currently owned by the Belmont Housing Authority and therefore pays no taxes; the other parcel would impact tax revenue by only \$149.00. Therefore, this article is effectively revenue neutral, and the WC will not make a recommendation to TM. It will report on the tax impact.

- **Article 16: Minuteman School Capital Building Stabilization Fund**

- Chair Allison said the Mr. Weis covered the WC's questions thoroughly last week. Therefore, the WC could vote on this article tonight. Selectman Jones said more information is needed on this regarding who controls this fund, who authorizes it, etc.

- *Member Lynch moved:* To recommend unfavorable action for the establishment of a Minuteman Stabilization Fund (Article 16).

- The motion passed unanimously.

- ***Presentations by Subcommittees (All Department Budgets)***

- Chair Allison said she is hoping to receive the reports electronically soon.

- **Public Works:** Member Epstein said that the PW report is completed and that the report recommends making greater progress on the incinerator site. He said recycling is more cost effective than trash pickup and should be encouraged. The report will support charging individual households for the repair of rotten sewer-lines. Regarding Community Development, the report would encourage a better relationship between the

PB and Community Development. Under Building Services, there has been some progress for the town/school consolidation process.

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- **Public Safety:** Member Libenson noted that the Fire Department report is in the hands of the fire chief. The request for two additional FTE positions has been withdrawn as some number of personnel are coming back from disability and the Chief hopes to get federal grants that would provide bridge funding from now until when projected retirements would allow the Department to pay for these positions out of existing funding.

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- Member Manjikian noted the committee supports an additional crossing guard in the Butler school area. He said the SRO position is now “to be determined” in the school’s budget. He then discussed the FTE number for the Police Department, noting that clarity is needed as the FTE numbers still aren’t reconciled between the PD and HR.

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- The WC briefly discussed Fire Department regionalization, with Selectman Jones noting that most communities (other than Belmont) have no interest in doing this.

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- **General Government:** Member Millane handed out draft reports and began with the financial departments (which include Accounting, Treasury, and the Assessor’s Office). She noted that there are few changes in the financial departments. The administrative departments (Town Clerk, Town Administrator, Information Technology, and Human Resources) are looking to increase the budget analyst position from part-time to full time and there is a retiring clerk, and the new clerk position will be moving to full time (costing \$14K).

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- Member Millane noted that a pay classification study is being requested (\$25K) as it has not been done in 10 years. Regarding the Town Clerk salary, the subcommittee is recommending an increase of 5.9%: \$66,052. Selectman Jones said this will be taken up at a Board of Selectmen meeting when the BOS votes on the May articles.

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- Chair Allison applauded the effort of the General Government subcommittee to streamline and simplify the report.

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- **Education:** Member Sarno gave an overview of the fluidity of the school budget since last January. He specifically noted the increases in SPED, legal service fees, bus transportation, and administrative salaries. He reviewed many of the budget numbers that are still in flux. He also reviewed money spent that is recurring and non-recurring. The budget now has a \$68K gap, but this number is not precise. The additional state aid money has not been discussed. The SC will vote on the budget on 4/24.

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- **Culture and Recreation:** Member Lynch noted that the draft report is completed and will be sent to each department. Highlights of recommendations for the Library include reviewing benefited part-time employees, IT investments, additional summer hours, and digital expansion. Consolidation of Health, COA, and Recreation is again

being recommended, as well as consideration of the use of CPA funds for the Underwood Pool.

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- Regarding the COA, while the data collection has improved, it needs better, more complete, and non-repetitive data. Rental expenses are exceeding revenues and that needs to be reversed. There is a recommendation for staff alignment regarding the social work position (currently a 10-month position) to be a full-year position. Transportation efficiencies are being encouraged.

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- Chair Allison requested electronic versions by late Friday night and will review the full document. The WC will meet from 6-7 pm on Monday, April 23 (pre TM), and again on Wednesday, April 25th to review the full budget report.

- ***Updates: Board of Selectman, Capital Budget Committee, Planning Board, School Committee***

- There were no updates to report.

- ***Update of Revised Budget Items***

- Chair Allison said final numbers need to be added into the following categories: recurring revenue, non-recurring revenue, recurring costs, and non-recurring savings. The numbers will be recommended to TM, once the WC agrees on them. The WC may need to meet on Monday, April 30 at 7:30 to finalize budget numbers.

- She explained that the process is what it is because state aid comes in late and everyone involved in formulating the budget also has numerous other responsibilities.

- ***Approval of Minutes***

- The minutes of 4/11/2012 will be approved at the next WC meeting.

- ***Adjournment***

- Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:37 pm.

- Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
- WC Recording Secretary

- [Image:Article 34 Demolition Delay & WC Analysis April 18.2012.pdf]